

Statement of
James F. Dodson
on behalf of the
National Cotton Council
before the
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives

**Hearing Concerning the Establishment of
the Department of Homeland Security**

Wednesday, June 26, 2002

Good afternoon. My name is Jimmy Dodson and I operate a diversified family farming operation in Robstown, Texas. My principal cash crop is cotton and my farm is in an active boll weevil eradication zone. I am testifying today on behalf of the National Cotton Council of America (NCC). The National Cotton Council is the central organization of the United States cotton industry. Its members include producers, ginner, oilseed crushers, merchants, cooperatives, warehousemen, and textile manufacturers. I currently serve as the President of the Cotton Foundation and Chairman of the National Cotton Council's Environmental Task Force.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Stenholm, Members of the Committee – thank you for holding today's hearing to allow us to provide comments on the proposal to move the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS). I want to be very clear - the National Cotton Council supports the President in his resolve to protect our country from the threat of terrorism. We appreciate the President's recognition that agriculture is a high priority and can play a major role for homeland security. As we discuss the details of this new department, do not let our questions or concerns about specific components of this proposal be construed as a lack of concern about homeland security.

In the legislation sent to Congress, the Administration has proposed the transfer of APHIS in its entirety into the new department. The overall mission of APHIS is to protect America's animal and plant resources and includes a diverse set of responsibilities from managing and monitoring agricultural pests and diseases existing in the U.S., to animal welfare, to regulating crops developed through biotechnology. These functions are accomplished through collaborative efforts with other USDA agencies as well as with hundreds of Federal, State, international, and nongovernmental organizations.

It is apparent that APHIS' role in preventing exotic pests and diseases from entering the U.S. would serve a critical purpose in the Department of Homeland Security. There are many other programs carried out by APHIS which do not readily appear germane to homeland security. This inconsistency raises a very basic question for Congress as it

creates this new federal department. That question is: Does the Administration and Congress view homeland security in a narrow sense which would focus strictly on terrorist activities from both international and domestic sources? Or, will homeland security be defined in a broader sense to include protection of our economy, our natural resources, and our food safety and supply? If a broad definition is adopted, then, many of APHIS' functions might be integrated into the new DHS without a loss of effectiveness. However, if a narrow view is adopted, many of the roles of APHIS that are critical to American agriculture might receive less priority and reduced funding. Programs like the Boll Weevil and Pink Bollworm Eradication Programs, oversight of bilateral agreements with other cotton producing countries, and risk assessment and permitting of new biotechnology crops might not receive high priority in a new department. I will devote the balance of my testimony to reviewing some of our specific questions and concerns with the wholesale transfer of APHIS to the Department of Homeland Security.

USDA has two sister agencies upon which the U.S. cotton industry heavily relies. The Agricultural Research Service (ARS) is the research agency and APHIS is the "action" agency our industry depends upon to develop, validate, and implement new and innovative technology coming out of ARS Research Laboratories and the State University research programs. APHIS is a critical link in technology development and delivery to USDA's grass roots customers. Mutual residence within USDA enhances coordination between ARS and APHIS.

APHIS has been vital in a program to eradicate the boll weevil, a key cotton pest, from the U.S. The boll weevil eradication effort started in North Carolina in 1978. Today, the eradication program is active on over 10 million acres in the U.S. - almost 60% of our cotton acreage. More than 30% of the acres planted to cotton are completely free of the boll weevil. APHIS provides critical national coordination of the boll weevil eradication program by working closely with producer-led state eradication foundations and the NCC's Boll Weevil Action Committee. APHIS provides coordinated program administration and allocates federal funds. Eradicated areas have increased yields, sharply reduced insecticide usage and lower control costs. NCC estimates that for every \$1 spent on boll weevil eradication, \$12 will accrue to our economy. If sufficient funding is available, we believe the boll weevil will be eradicated within the next 6-10 years. We have very serious concerns about whether the new Department of Homeland Security would aggressively seek the funding for the annual 30% cost share. We also have concerns about whether APHIS resources and personnel would continue to place high priority on the completion of this successful program.

APHIS is also working with cotton farmers to eradicate another important pest in our western states - the pink bollworm. U.S. cotton producers, along with producers in Mexico, have now committed to implement programs to eradicate the pink bollworm from the U.S. and adjacent areas in Northern Mexico. APHIS is essential to program implementation because of their ability to coordinate activities of budget planning, equipment coordination, and program implementation across state lines. APHIS and NCC's Pink Bollworm Action Committee form a partnership critically important for program planning and operational oversight. Since Mexico must be a partner, the APHIS

role in international programs is absolutely essential. Again, we are concerned about the priority this program would receive if APHIS is absorbed into the new department.

APHIS also performs a vital role in facilitating exports of U.S. cotton and cotton products. It also monitors imported cotton to protect U.S. farmers from pests and diseases. Confidence in APHIS's technical capabilities and strict adherence to process provide assurance to overseas buyers of U.S. fiber and products that imported goods meet agreed upon phytosanitary standards. In recent months, APHIS has actively worked to eliminate redundant fumigation requirements for U.S. exports of cotton to Peru, Colombia, and Pakistan. This effort has enhanced U.S. competitiveness in those markets by reducing costs and fumigant use.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you again for this opportunity to provide comments on these issues. In summary, the National Cotton Council supports the President's proposal for a Department of Homeland Security. Mr. Chairman, we are not prepared to provide specific recommendations until certain questions and concerns are clarified. However, we look forward to working with you and your colleagues to ensure that APHIS can continue to carry out the critical functions I have illustrated in my statement.

We understand the urgency of this matter. At the same time, we urge Members of this committee to move judiciously so that our new Department of Homeland Security will be as efficient and effective as possible while still protecting agricultural concerns.